



News from the Cultural Resources Management,
Tribal Liaison Office, & Environmental Programs of the
Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs,
Alaska Army National Guard

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4th Quarter 2011, December

Greetings,

This winter started off with a bang with a huge hurricane-like snowstorm slamming the western coast of Alaska. Roofs were torn off, electricity knocked out, and the erosion was heavy in many villages. The hardy folks living alongside the bountiful Bering and Chukchi Seas handled the 'Superstorm' with grit and savvy that comes with generations of experience in this environment. We will probably be recalling stories of the big storm of 2011 for a long time. I hope to have a chance to sit down with you and hear more about it.

Weather Webcams

The Federal Aviation Administration provides a helpful website (<http://akweathercams.faa.gov/index.php>) that shows the current weather at many airfield locations around the state. Photographs are updated every ten minutes. It has some interesting features, like "looping", so you can watch the sun come up or go down at your aunty's village, or check on the snowfall on the other side of the mountain.

Everybody Loves Walruses

It won't be long before the new movie *Big Miracle* will be released (it was originally titled *Everybody Loves Whales*). It will be interesting to see how Hollywood portrays that incident where the whales were trapped by the ice up in Barrow back in October 1988. There was another episode that took place in June 1988 that involved the cooperative efforts of the Alaska National Guard and the Russians that has not received as much attention. This other event took place near St. Lawrence Island.



Here is an excerpt from the book by C.A. Salisbury called *Soldiers in the Mist* that talks about that.

“The first visible thaw along the Arctic border occurred as a result of heavy fog near the village of Gambell on St. Lawrence Island in June 1988. The island communities had sent out a fleet of boats to hunt for walrus. Six members of the Slwooko family and a local white teacher were in two open boats which did not return from the hunt. The heavy fog had separated them from the rest of the hunting party. They lashed their two boats together and drifted and prayed in the heavy seas and fog. Occasionally, they would pull the boats up on floating ice and hunt to survive.

“They would spend three weeks navigating between floating ice islands before they would be rescued. The searchers thought that they may have drifted across the 40-mile sea to the Soviet Union.

“The massive search by the Army and Air National Guard pioneered a cooperative effort with the Soviet Union’s MAR FLOT search and rescue organization. The Soviets used several ships and a helicopter to search for the walrus hunters. Although the Soviets eventually gave up the search, they did give Governor Cowper permission to order three Alaska Army National Guard Twin Otter airplanes to fly along the Siberian coast for a final six-hour search for the missing Alaskans. No American military planes had flown over Soviet air space since World War Two. The hunters eventually found their way back to Southeast Cape on their home island of St. Lawrence and they were reunited with their families.”

The photograph on the previous page is by Sgt. Greg Suhay and shows Junior (Vernon) Slwooko who lead the walrus hunting party and brought every one back safely. Maybe someday we will see a movie of that rigorous adventure.

Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Employee: Shannon Fitzgerald



Shannon Fitzgerald, Hazardous Waste Coordinator for the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA), originally hails from western Massachusetts (go Red Sox!), but has fallen pretty in love with Alaska. She earned her Bachelor of Science in Biology from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst and her Master of Science degree in Toxicology from CIBNOR (Centro de Investigaciones Biologicas del Noroeste) and San Diego State University, studying levels of heavy metals in various tissues of marine turtles (*Biometals*, 2006). Living in La Paz, Mexico for nearly two years, Shannon earned her Mexican name “Guadalupe” and enjoyed life in the glorious Baja Peninsula. Before moving to Alaska, she taught Biology on both the high school

and community college level and has served as an adjunct instructor here at University of Alaska in Anchorage.

Shannon has been with the DMVA for a little over a year and has been very grateful to see a good deal of the Great Land on the job. Her duties include characterization of waste, coordination of waste pick-up and communication with facilities to enable waste disposal. She is also very excited to be involved in the implementation of recycling to JBER. She loves being outdoors, Frisbee, musical instruments, traveling and her two furry sidekicks: Luppy, a 7 year old Delta certified Golden Retriever who serves as a pet therapy dog at the AWAIC (Abused Women’s Aid in Crisis) shelter in town and Casey, a 3 year old, 3-legged Border Collie with a ton of spirit.

Alaska Forum on the Environment

The Alaska Forum on the Environment will be at the Dena'ina Convention Center in Anchorage on February 6 through the 10, 2012. Don't forget about their new (started last year) Environmental Technician Apprenticeship Program. I had the good fortune of working in the villages this summer with a successful apprentice. Apprenticeship application and information for the 2012 cycle will be available beginning January, 2012. Applications will be reviewed by the Alaska Forum and the Apprenticeship Committee of participating employers to select candidates for the 2012 Apprenticeship. Selected applicants will have the opportunity to take the core classroom requirements beginning in mid-April 2012. Employers will hire selected Apprentices as field season work begins (often in May each year, depending upon employer and project scope). You can find out more from <http://akforum.com/apprenticeship.html>, or by phoning 888-301-0185 (toll free).

Armory Spotlight: Kenai

The Alaska Army National Guard armory building in Kenai is on a 5.09 acre parcel on South Forest Drive, just north of Kenai Municipal Park. Shquittsatnu Creek winds along the eastern boundary of the property, and dumps into the Kenai River less than a mile away, right where the Kenai River meets the Cook Inlet. The tan cinderblock building, at approximately 12,040 square feet, was built in 1973.



What's Up with the National Environmental Policy Act?

An Answer from DMVA NEPA Specialist Timothy Shaw

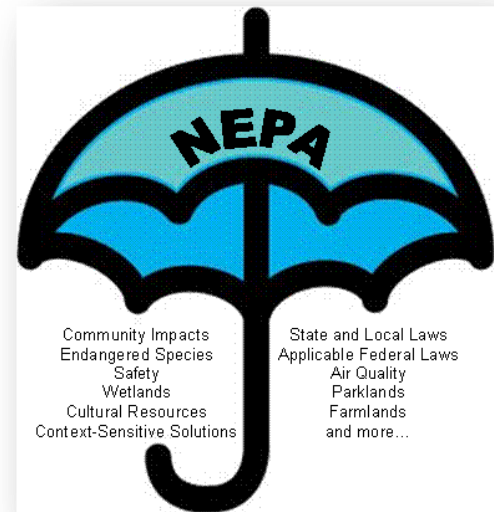
Egads! He said "NEPA"! Most people have heard the term NEPA and know it has something to do with the environment. NEPA stands for the National Environmental Policy Act that was passed in 1969. The goal for NEPA is for federal agencies, federally funded projects, and projects that require a federal permit to take pause and consider how their actions affect the environment. NEPA does not mean that a project will be stopped. It does mean that the project will be analyzed as to how it will affect the environment.

NEPA analysis can range from a simple checklist to a more detailed Environmental Assessment (EA) to a very involved Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Checklists are limited to regular and routine projects that a federal agency conducts. Where there is reasonable belief that a project *may* have significant environmental impacts then an EA is conducted. An EA consists of a description of what and why a project is needed, alternatives considered, identifies the affected environment, environmental consequences of the project actions, public comment, and conclusions. If the public comments are addressed and the EA conclusions are supportive

of the project, then a Finding Of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is issued. The FONSI includes any changes, environmental mitigation efforts that the project may need as a result from the public comments and EA conclusions. An EA can take 10 to 24 months to properly complete.

Sometimes the scope of a project *will* have significant effects on the environment, such as building a bridge between Anchorage and Point McKenzie, or a road to McGrath. With such projects an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is required. The EIS begins with a publicized Notice of Intent so people in the project area have plenty of time to begin research and formulate concerns and comments on the project. At the heart of the EIS is the EA which will be expanded and analyzed at an even closer level. Public comment is even more important in an EIS, because the project is going to effect the environment whose stewardship is in our hands. When all the comments and alternatives have been considered and addressed a Record of Decision (ROD) is produced. The ROD identifies the final actions of the project, which has likely changed from the initial proposed actions due to NEPA analysis and public comment. An EIS can take over a decade to complete.

NEPA analysis reviews a project as it interacts with the Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act, Endangered Species Act, Marine Mammal Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act, Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act, National Historic Preservation Act, and other acts, executive orders, and laws. The NEPA process is not designed to kill a project, but to take pause and use as a tool for planning and decision making with consideration of physical, biological, ecological, and economic factors. NEPA is part of being good stewards of the environment.



Bits of History in Alaska

History happens all the time. The Alaska Historical Society reminds us of some of the things that have happened around Alaska at their website: <http://www.alaskahistoricalociety.org/index.cfm/discover-alaska/This-Month-in-Alaska-History/33>. Here are a few that took place during winters long ago:

December 24, 1906 - Ketchikan received telegraphic service by submarine cable.

January 21, 1911 - Mount Wrangell erupted and an earthquake shook central Alaska.

February 27, 1923 - The 1,400-foot Tanana River steel bridge on the Alaska Railroad at Nenana was completed.



Communication Links

What are your preferred methods of contact?	<input type="radio"/> Letter	<input type="radio"/> Fax	<input type="radio"/> Email	<input type="radio"/> Telephone
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Offices

Mailing address		
Primary email		
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Phone number(s)	Fax number	

Do you have other staff that you would like us to include in our consultation for environmental and cultural issues?

Office	Name and contact information
Tribal Administrator	
Environmental Coordinator	
Realty	
Elders Office	
Other	

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